

The Last Shot

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SYNOPSIS.

At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays, Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westering of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane. Ten years later, Westering, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Marta, who is visiting in the Gray capital. Westering calls on Marta. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win. On the march with the 2d of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, declares war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron everhaing, begs him off.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

Then impulse broke through the restraint that seemed to characterize the Lanstron of thirty-five. The Lanstron of twenty-five, who had met catastrophe because he was "wool-gathering," asserted himself. He put his hand on Stransky's shoulder. It was a strong though slim hand that looked as if it had been trained to do the work of two hands in the process of its owner's own transformation. Thus the old sergeant had seen a general demonstrate with a brave veteran who had been guilty of bad conduct in Africa. The old colonel gasped at such a subversion of the dignity of rank. He saw the army going to the devil. But young Dellarme, watching with eager curiosity, was sensible of no familiarity in the act. It all depended on how such a thing was done, he was thinking.

"We all have minutes when we are more or less anarchists," said Lanstron in the human appeal of one man to another. "But we don't want to be judged by one of those minutes. I got a hand mashed up for a mistake that took only a second. Think this over tonight before you act. Then, if you are of the same opinion, go to the colonel and tell him so. Come, why not?"

"All right, sir, you're so decent about it!" grumbled Stransky, taking his place in the ranks.

"Hep-hep-hep! The regiment started on its way, with Grandfather Fragil keeping at his grandson's side.

"Makes me feel young again, but it's darned solemn beside the Hussars, and their horses bite a-jingling. Times have certainly changed—officers' hands in their pockets, saying 'if you don't mind' to a man that's insulted the flag! Kicking ain't good enough for that traitor! Ought to hang him—yes, sir, hang and draw him!"

Lanstron watched the marching column for a time.

"Hep-hep-hep! It's the brown of the infantry that counts in the end," he mused. "I liked that wall-eyed giant. He's all man!"

Then his living glance swept the heavens inquiringly. A speck in the blue, far away in the realms of atmospheric infinity, kept growing in size until it took the form of the wings with which man flies. The plane flew down with steady swiftness, till its racing shadow lay large over the landscape for a few seconds before it rose again with beautiful ease and precision.

"Bully for you, Etzel!" Lanstron thought, as he started back to the aeroplane station. "You belong in the corps. We shall not let you return to your regiment for a while. You've a cool head and you'd charge a church tower if that were the orders."

CHAPTER V.

A Sunday Morning Call. As a boy, Arthur Lanstron had persisted in being an exception to the influences of both heredity and environment. Though his father and both grandfathers were officers who believed theirs to be the true gentleman's profession, he had preferred any kind of mechanical toy to arranging the most gayly painted tin soldiers in formation on the nursery floor; and he would rather read about the wonders of natural history and electricity than the campaigns of Napoleon and Frederick the Great and my Lord Nelson. Left to his own choice, he would miss the parade of the garrison for inspection by an excellency in order to ask questions of a man wiping the oil off his hands with cotton-waste, who was far more entertaining to him than the most spick-and-span ramrod of a sergeant.

see results, had to earn them. He realized in practicing the truth of Partow's saying that there was nothing he had ever learned but what would be of service to him as an officer.

"Finding enough work to do?" Partow would ask with a chuckle when they met in these days; for he had made Lanstron both chief of intelligence and chief aeroplane officer. Young Colonel Lanstron's was the duty of gaining the secrets of the Gray staff and keeping those of the Brown staff and organizing up-to-the-moment efficiency in the new forces of the air.

He had remarked truly enough that the injury to his left hand served as a better reminder against the folly of wool-gathering than a string, even a large red string, tied around his finger. Thanks to skillful surgery, the fingers, incapable of spreading much, were yet serviceable and had a firm grip of the wheel as he rose from the aeroplane station on the Sunday morning after Marta's return home for a fight to La Tir.

He knew the pattern weaving under his feet as one knows that of his own garden from an overlooking window. Every detail of the staff map, ravines, roads, buildings, battery positions, was stitched together in the flowing reality of actual vision. No white posts were necessary to tell him where the boundary between the two nations lay. The line was drawn in his brain.

Now that Lanstron was the organizer of the aviation corps his own flights were rare. Mostly they were made to La Tir. His visits to Marta were his holidays. All the time that she was absent on her journey around the world they had corresponded. Her letters, so revealing of herself and her peculiar angles of observation, formed a bundle sacredly preserved. Her mother's joking reference about her girlish resolution not to marry a soldier often recurred to him. There, he sometimes thought, was the real obstacle to his great desire.

When he alighted from the plane he thrust his left hand into his blouse pocket. He always carried it there, as if it were literally sewn in place. In moments of emotion the scarred nerves would twitch as the tattle of his sensitiveness; and this was something he would conceal from others no matter how conscious he was of it himself. He found the Galland veranda deserted. In response to his ring a maid came to the open door. Her face was sad, with a beauty that had prematurely faded. But it lighted pleasantly in recognition. Her hair was thick and tawny, lying low over the brow; her eyes were a softly luminous brown and her full lips sensitive and yielding. Lanstron, an intimate of the Galland household, knew her story well and the part that Marta had played in it.

Some four years previously, when a baby was in prospect for Minna, who wore no wedding ring, Mrs. Galland had been inclined to send the maid to an institution, "where they will take good care of her, my dear. That's what such institutions are for. It is quite scandalous for her and for us—never happened in our family before!"

Marta arched her eyebrows. "We don't know!" she exclaimed softly.

"How can you think such a thing, let alone saying it—you, a Galland!" her mother gasped in indignation.

"That is, if we go far back," said Marta. "At all events, we have no precedent, so let's establish one by keeping her."

"But for her own sake! She will have to live with her shame!" Mrs. Galland objected. "Let her begin afresh in the city. We shall give her a good recommendation, for she is really an excellent servant. Yes, she will readily find a place among strangers."

"Still, she doesn't want to go, and it would be cruel to send her away."

that the world thinks she ought to be called Maggie."

Proceeding leisurely along the main path of the first terrace, Lanstron followed it past the rear of the house to the old tower. Long ago the moat that surrounded the castle had been filled in. The green of rows of grape vines lay against the background of a mat of ivy on the ancient stone walls, which had been cut away from the loopholes set with window glass. The door was open, showing a room that had been closed in by a ceiling of boards from the walls to the circular stairway that ran aloft from the dungeons. On the floor of flags were cheap rugs. A number of seed and nursery catalogues were piled on a round table covered with a brown cloth.

"Hello!" Lanstron called softly. "Hello!" he called louder and yet louder.

Receiving no answer, he retraced his steps and seated himself on the second terrace in a secluded spot in the shadow of the first terrace wall, where he could see anyone coming up the main flight of steps from the road. When Marta walked she usually came from town by that way. At length the sound of a slow step from another direction broke on his ear. Some one was approaching along the path that ran at his feet. Around the corner of the wall, in his workman's Sunday clothes of black, but wearing his old straw hat, appeared Feller, the gardener. He paused to examine a rose bush and Lanstron regarded him thoughtfully.

As he turned away he looked up, and a glance of definite and unflinching recognition was exchanged between the two men. They had the garden to themselves.

"Gustave!" Lanstron exclaimed under his breath.

"Lanny!" exclaimed the gardener, turning over a branch of the rose bush. He seemed unwilling to risk talking openly with Lanstron.

"You look the good workman in his Sunday best to a T!" said Lanstron.

"Being stone-deaf," returned Feller, with a trace of drollery in his voice. "I hear very well—at times. Tell me—his whisper was quivering with eagerness—'shall we fight? Shall we fight?'"

"We are nearer to it than we have ever been in our time," Lanstron replied.

The hat still shaded Feller's face, his stoop was unchanged, but the branch in his hand shook.

"Honest?" he exclaimed. "Oh, the chance of it! The chance of it!"

"Gustave!" Lanstron's voice, still low, came in a gust of sympathy, and the pocket which concealed his hand gave a nervous twitch as if it held something alive and distinct from his own being. "The trial wears on you! Do you want to go?"

"No!" Feller shot back irritably. "No!" he repeated resolutely. "I don't want to go! I mean to be game—I!"

anger, in laughing mockery, in militant seriousness, but never before like this. The pain and indignation in her eyes came not from the sheer hurt of a wound but from the hurt of its source. It was as if he had learned by the signal of its loss that he had a deeper hold on her than he had realized.

"Yes, I have a bone to pick with you," she said, recovering a grim sort of fellowship. "A big bone! If you're half a friend you'll give me the very marrow of it."

"I am ready!" he answered more pathetically than philosophically.

"There's not time now; after luncheon, when mother is taking her nap," she concluded as they came to the last step and saw Mrs. Galland on the veranda.

After luncheon Mrs. Galland kept battling with her nods until nature was victorious and she fell fast asleep. Marta, grown restless with impatience, suggested to Lanstron that they stroll in the garden, and they took the path past the house toward the castle tower, stopping in an arbor with high hedges on either side around a statue of Mercury.

"Now!" exclaimed Marta narrowly. "It was you, Lanny, who recommended Feller to us as a gardener, competent though deaf! I have proved him to be a man of most sensitive hearing. I didn't let him know that he was discovered. You brought him here—you, Lanny, you are the one to explain."

"True, he is not deaf!" Lanstron replied.

"He is a spy?" she asked.

"Yes, a spy. You can put things in a bright light, Marta! He found words coming with difficulty in face of the pain and disfigurement of her set look."

"Using some man as a pawn; setting him as a spy in the garden where you have been the welcome friend!" she exclaimed. "A spy on what—on my mother, on Minna, on me, on the flowers, as a part of this monstrous game of trickery and lies that you are playing?"

There was no trace of anger in her tone. It was that of one mortally hurt. Anger would have been easier to bear than the measuring, penetrating wonder that found him guilty of such a horrible part. Those eyes would have confused Partow himself with the steady, willing intensity of their gaze. She did not see how his left hand was twitching and how he stilled its movement by pressing it against the bench.

"You will take Feller with you when you go!" she said, rising.

Lanstron dropped his head in a kind of shaking throbb of his whole body and raised a face white with appeal.

"Marta!" He was speaking to a profile, very sensitive and yet like ivory. "I've no excuse for such an abuse of hospitality except the obsession of a loathsome work that some man must do and I was set to do. My God, Marta! I cease to be natural and human. I am a machine. I keep thinking, what if I war comes and some error of mine let the enemy know where to strike the blow of victory; or if there were information I might have gained and failed to gain that would have given us the victory—if, because I had not done my part, thousands of lives of our soldiers were sacrificed needlessly!"

At that she turned on him quickly, her face softening.

word—"you wanted him here for your plans? And why? You haven't answered that yet. What purpose of the war game does he serve in our garden?"

His look pleaded for patience, while he tried to smile, which was rather difficult in face of her attitude.

"Not altogether in the garden; partly in the tower," he replied. "You are to be in the whole secret and in such a way as to make my temptation clear. I hope. First, I think you ought to see the setting. Let us go in."

Impelled by a curiosity that Lanstron's manner accentuated, she entered the room. Apparently Lanstron was familiar with the premises. Passing through the sitting-room into the room adjoining, where Feller stored his tools, he opened a door that gave on to the circular stone steps leading down into the dungeon tunnel.

"I think we had better have a light," he said, and when he had fetched one from the bedchamber he descended the steps, asking her to follow.

They were in a passage six feet in height and about three feet broad, which seemed to lead on indefinitely into clammy darkness. The dewy walls sparkled in fantastic and ghostly fluorescence under the rays from the lantern. The dank air lay moist against their faces.

"This is far enough." He paused and raised the lantern. With its light full in her face, she blinked. "There, at the height of your chin!"

She noted a metal button painted gray, set at the side of one of the stones of the wall, which looked unreal. She struck the stone with her knuckles and it gave out the sound of hollow wood, which was followed, as an echo, by a little laugh from Lanstron. Pressing the button, a panel door flew open, revealing a telephone mouthpiece and receiver set in the recess.

"Like a detective play!" were the first words that sprang to her lips. "Well?" As she faced around her eyes glittered in the lantern rays. "Well, have you any other little tricks to show me? Are you a sleight-of-hand artist, too, Lanny? Are you going to take a machine gun out of your hat?"

"That is the whole bag," he answered. "I thought you'd rather see it than have it described to you."

"Having seen it, let us go!" she said, in a manner that implied further reckoning to come.

"If out of a thousand possible sources one source succeeds, then the cost and pains of the other nine hundred and ninety-nine are more than repaid," he was saying urgently, the soldier's earnestness in him.

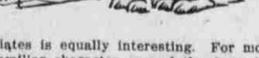
"The best service we have had has been absurd in its simplicity and its audacity. In time of war more than one battle has been decided by a thing that was a trifle in itself. No matter what your preparation, you can never remove the element of chance. An hour gained in information about your enemy's plans may turn the tide in your favor. A Chinese peasant spy, because he happened to be intoxicated, was able to give the Japanese warning in time for Kuroki to make full dispositions for receiving the Russian attack in force at the Sha-ho. There are many other incidents of like nature in history. So is it my duty to neglect no possible method, however absurd."

By this time he was at the head of the steps. Standing to one side, he offered his hand to assist Marta. But she seemed not to see it. Her aspect was that of downright antagonism.

Tales of Gotham and Other Cities

Pet Cat, Saved From Chloroform, Tries Suicide

NEW YORK.—It is little wonder that Minnie, the pet cat at the Staten Island ferry house in Manhattan, attempted to commit suicide. For two days she had more than any cat could bear without being driven to distraction.



Four of her most intimate cat friends who had long been her companions were taken from her, and she was left to bemoan her lot alone. Minnie had a narrow escape herself, and it was only because of the tears of strong-hearted men around the ferry house that she was allowed to remain behind when the others went.

Minnie's history is interesting. The story of how she escaped being chloroformed along with her associates is equally interesting. For more than twelve years she has been a familiar character around the ferry house.

It is known that she is the mother of at least 397 cats. Frank Wolf, who has charge of the restaurant in the ferry house, has kept track of them, and has the number of each litter written on the wall. Consequently, it is safe to say, as a friend of Minnie remarked, that more than half the cats around the Battery can claim her as kin and break her will in a pinch.

For some time there has been a complaint against the large number of cats around the ferry house. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was notified and asked to remove some of the felines. A wagon from that institution backed up there, and there was a wild scamper to round up the cats. All of them were taken after an interesting chase. Minnie was the last to fall into the hands of the society agents.

"You don't dare take her away," cried Mr. Wolf, as he dropped a plate of beans on the counter and hurried after the agent.

Three other men, one from the candy stand, one from the boiler room, and the third a relief man in ticket chopping, followed in his wake. They lost no time convincing the agent that Minnie "really belonged," and that they would answer for her if he would leave her behind. They were willing to put up a one-thousand-dollar peace bond for her.

Minnie was left behind. Late in the afternoon she became disconsolate and deliberately dived off the ferry slip into the bay, intent upon drowning herself. But "Larry" Hanlon, acting superintendent of ferries, saw her, and fished her out with a long pole.

Minnie is now kept inside the candy stand until she overcomes her suicide mania.

He Met a Charming Girl From His Old Home Town

INDIANAPOLIS.—He is a fellow who likes to talk about his "old home town." It is just a little town, but he knows everybody there and enjoys talking about his old friends and neighbors. The result is that all of his business associates in Indianapolis are familiar with names and scenes in his "old home town."



The other day a rather comely woman of middle years met him in front of the courthouse. He is seen and known in that neighborhood. She asked if he was the real estate agent who had promised to meet her there.

"No, I'm not a real estate man," he replied politely, "but I know most of the boys and may be able to find him for you. I will go and bring him to you in a minute or two."



A Speck in the Blue Far Away.



MIRROR FOR DAINTY WOMAN OVERSIGHT THAT WAS FATAL

May Be Held in the Mouth, Leaving Both Hands Free to Arrange the Back Hair. Light-Fingered Gentleman Might Have Got Away With the Coat But for One Thing.

At last a woman may have both hands free to arrange her back hair as she looks in a mirror. This is made possible now by the invention of a mirror which can be held in the mouth, thus reflecting the back of the head from the main mirror of the dressing table.

It is the invention of a Frenchman. Who has given so much thought to the elegances of woman's toilet as the French?

This new mirror is broad, so as to give a good general view sideways, and being fixed on a curved bar, stands well out from the face, so that there is no strain on the eyes.

Suicide Prevented by an Elusive Collar Button

LOS ANGELES.—Ralston Wilkes for weeks had not been in good health. His distress so preyed upon him that it caused disension between him and his wife. Mr. Wilkes thought that ill health, an unhappy home, and an angry wife were too great afflictions for a man to stand, and he notified his most intimate friends that he intended to kill himself.



Such news he forwarded to Mrs. Wilkes, who was in Hollywood, housed by relatives. As soon as she received the alarm she notified the police and the police went to the Wilkes residence, No. 1453 North Coronado street, and questioned the man. He said he felt very bad indeed, that he was consumed by a fever that the doctors had been unable to break, and was depressed. He could not perspire.

As his threats were not sufficiently active to warrant arrest, the police left him there. The next morning Mr. Wilkes, who is a carpenter, arose early and prepared the poison that was to cause his death.